

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEBRASKA

RAYMOND C. OWEN,)	4:09CV3170
)	
Petitioner,)	
)	
v.)	MEMORANDUM
)	AND ORDER
ROBERT HOUSTON,)	
)	
Respondent.)	

The court has conducted an initial review of the Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (filing no. [1](#)) to determine whether the claims made by Petitioner are, when liberally construed, potentially cognizable in federal court. Petitioner has made four claims.

Condensed and summarized for clarity, the claims asserted by Petitioner are:

Claim One¹: The trial court erred in (1) failing to sustain Petitioner's Motions for Mistrial; (2) denying Petitioner's Motion for Acquittal Notwithstanding the Verdict; (3) denying Petitioner's Motion for New Trial; (4) instructing the jury "through jury instructions that were prejudicial and erroneous"; (5) failing to prepare a proper verdict form; and (6) failing to properly examine the verdict form before providing it to the jury.

¹Claim One includes the claims set forth in Grounds One through Seven of the Petition. (Filing No. [1](#) at CM/ECF pp. 7-11.)

Claim Two: Petitioner was denied the effective assistance of counsel in violation of the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments *because* Petitioner's trial counsel (1) did not thoroughly examine the verdict form during the jury instructions conference; (2) did not object to the erroneous verdict form; (3) did not object to a highly prejudicial statement made by the victim; (4) did not object to the prosecution's reference during closing arguments to a highly prejudicial statement that the trial court had stricken from the record; and (5) did not object to unfounded allegations and prejudicial remarks made by the prosecution during Petitioner's sentencing hearing.

Claim Three: Petitioner was denied the effective assistance of counsel in violation of the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments *because* Petitioner's appellate counsel did not argue on direct appeal that Petitioner's trial counsel (1) did not thoroughly examine the verdict form during the jury instructions conference; (2) did not object to the erroneous verdict form; (3) did not object to a highly prejudicial statement made by the victim; (4) did not object to the prosecution's reference during closing arguments to a highly prejudicial statement that the trial court had stricken from the record; and (5) did not object to unfounded allegations and prejudicial remarks made by the prosecution during Petitioner's sentencing hearing.

Claim Four: Petitioner was denied due process of law *because*

“numerous instances of ineffectiveness of trial counsel, prosecutorial misconduct, and judicial error had inherent synergistic effect[s] [that allowed] the state to influence the assessment of the evidence.”

Liberally construed, the court preliminarily decides that Claims Two, Three, and Four are potentially cognizable in federal court. However, the court cautions that no determination has been made regarding the merits of these claims or any defenses thereto or whether there are procedural bars that will prevent Petitioner from obtaining the relief sought.

Liberally construed, the court decides that Claim One is not cognizable in a federal court habeas action. This court is limited to deciding whether a state court conviction violated the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States. [28 U.S.C. § 2254](#). Claim One involves questions of state law that have already been decided by a state court. [Lupien v. Clarke, 403 F.3d 615, 619 \(8th Cir. 2005\)](#).

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that:

1. Upon initial review of the Petition (filing no. [1](#)), the court preliminarily determines that Petitioner’s Claims Two, Three, and Four are potentially cognizable in federal court.
2. The court determines that Claim One is not cognizable in a federal court habeas action and is therefore dismissed.
3. The Clerk of the court is directed to mail copies of this Memorandum and Order and the Petition to Respondents and the Nebraska Attorney General by regular first-class mail.

4. By October 18, 2009, Respondent shall file a motion for summary judgment or state court records in support of an answer. The Clerk of the court is directed to set a pro se case management deadline in this case using the following text: October 18, 2009: deadline for Respondent to file state court records in support of answer or motion for summary judgment.

5. If Respondent elects to file a motion for summary judgment, the following procedures shall be followed by Respondent and Petitioner:

- A. The motion for summary judgment shall be accompanied by a separate brief, submitted at the time of the filing of the motion.
- B. The motion for summary judgment shall be supported by such state court records as are necessary to support the motion. Those records shall be contained in a separate filing entitled: "Designation of State Court Records in Support of Motion for Summary Judgment."
- C. Copies of the motion for summary judgment, the designation, including state court records, and Respondent's brief shall be served upon Petitioner *except* that Respondent is only required to provide Petitioner with a copy of the specific pages of the record which are cited in the Respondent's brief. In the event that the designation of state court records is deemed insufficient by Petitioner, Petitioner may file a motion with the court requesting additional documents. Such motion shall set forth the documents requested and the reasons the documents are relevant to the cognizable claims.
- D. No later than 30 days following the filing of the motion for

summary judgment, Petitioner shall file and serve a brief in opposition to the motion for summary judgment. Petitioner shall submit no other documents unless directed to do so by the court.

- E. No later than 30 days after the filing of Petitioner's brief, Respondent shall file and serve a reply brief. In the event that the Respondent elects not to file a reply brief, he should inform the court by filing a notice stating that he will not file a reply brief and that the motion is therefore fully submitted for decision.
- F. If the motion for summary judgment is denied, Respondent shall file an answer, a designation and a brief that complies with terms of this order. (*See* the following paragraph.) The documents shall be filed no later than 30 days after the denial of the motion for summary judgment. **Respondent is warned that the failure to file an answer, a designation and a brief in a timely fashion may result in the imposition of sanctions, including the release of the petitioner.**

6. If Respondent elects to file an answer, the following procedures shall be followed by Respondent and Petitioner:

- A. By October 18, 2009, Respondent shall file all state court records which are relevant to the cognizable claims. *See, e.g., [Rule 5\(c\)-\(d\) of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts](#)*. Those records shall be contained in a separate filing entitled: "Designation of State Court Records In Support of Answer."
- B. No later than 30 days after the filing of the relevant state court

records, Respondent shall file an answer. The answer shall be accompanied by a separate brief, submitted at the time of the filing of the answer. Both the answer and brief shall address all matters germane to the case including, but not limited to, the merits of Petitioner's allegations that have survived initial review, and whether any claim is barred by a failure to exhaust state remedies, a procedural bar, non-retroactivity, a statute of limitations, or because the petition is an unauthorized second or successive petition. *See, e.g., Rules 5(b) and 9 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts.*

- C. Copies of the answer, the designation, and Respondent's brief shall be served upon the petitioner at the time they are filed with the court *except* that Respondent is only required to provide the petitioner with a copy of the specific pages of the designated record which are cited in Respondent's brief. In the event that the designation of state court records is deemed insufficient by Petitioner, Petitioner may file a motion with the court requesting additional documents. Such motion shall set forth the documents requested and the reasons the documents are relevant to the cognizable claims.
- D. No later than 30 days following the filing of Respondent's brief, Petitioner shall file and serve a brief in response. Petitioner shall submit no other documents unless directed to do so by the court.
- E. No later than 30 days after the filing of Petitioner's brief, Respondent shall file and serve a reply brief. In the event that Respondent elects not to file a reply brief, he should inform the

court by filing a notice stating that he will not file a reply brief and that the merits of the petition are therefore fully submitted for decision.

- F. The Clerk of the court is directed to set a pro se case management deadline in this case using the following text: November 17, 2009: check for respondent to file answer and separate brief.

7. No discovery shall be undertaken without leave of the court. See [Rule 6 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts](#).

September 4, 2009.

BY THE COURT:

Richard G. Kopf

United States District Judge

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